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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001945

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SUBJECT: AS SAUERBREY'S MEETINGS WITH PRIME MINISTER AND  
REFUGEE LEADERS

REF: A. KATHMANDU 1944 B. KATHMANDU 1943

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

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11. (C) In a meeting with Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Sauerbrey November 3, Prime Minister Koirala expressed concern about four aspects of the resettlement program for Bhutanese refugees: the citizenship status of the refugees, speed of the resettlement program (he would prefer a one-year program), transparency of who goes when, and the lack of physical separation between those opting for resettlement versus repatriation. The Prime Minister was not receptive to Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey's request to issue exit permits to 500 vulnerable Tibetan refugees or 59 extremely vulnerable Bhutanese refugees prior to the start of general processing. The Assistant Secretary heard another plea to put pressure on Bhutan to allow repatriation. Later the same day prominent Kathmandu-based leaders of the Bhutanese refugees, among them, Tek Nath Rizal, urged the U.S. to host a meeting with Nepal, India, and Bhutan to promote repatriation but were suprisingly moderate in their stance on resettlement -- both with the Assistant Secretary and later with the media.

Four Concerns About Resettlement Program

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12. (C) Prime Minister Koirala expressed concern about four aspects of the U.S. resettlement program for Bhutanese refugees: the citizenship status of the refugees, speed of the resettlement program, transparency of who gets resettled when, and the lack of separation between those opting for resettlement versus repatriation. The Prime Minister was concerned the refugees would remain temporarily stateless although they would become eligible for legal permanent residency after one year and could apply for citizenship after five years. He also thought that the refugees should be resettled quicker than the four to five years foreseen by the U.S. Both Koirala and his former Foreign Policy Advisor Dr. Suresh Chalise (now Ambassador-designate to the U.S.) who participated in the meeting stated that Nepal's exit permit

process would not slow down U.S. processing. The Assistant Secretary replied that the U.S. could only process and take

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in about 20,000 refugees per year, but reminded the PM that resettlement offers by other countries would further reduce the numbers in the refugee camps. Sauerbrey explained that among those first to be resettled would be those first to arrive in the camps, and then those first to file for resettlement. Prime Minister Koirala found this to be a clear and reasonable policy. The Prime Minister said that he favored those opting for resettlement being housed at a separate location so they would not face conflict within the camps. Sauerbrey replied that would delay the program and further disrupt refugees' lives, but we would monitor the safety of those who want to be resettled.

#### No Progress on Tibetans or EVIs

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13. (C) Prime Minister Koirala declined Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey's request for the Government of Nepal to allow 500 vulnerable Tibetan refugees to leave. He stressed the Chinese were very sensitive about this prospect and the GON would prefer if the Tibetans simply crossed the open border with India, and then proceeded to the United States. (Note: Tibetans arriving in India from Nepal without documents from the GON cannot legally obtain exit permits from the GOI.) Koirala grudgingly admitted the GON might be willing to address the cases of a handful of Tibetan refugees (two to four, not five hundred), but reiterated that the GON's first priority was to resolve the Bhutanese refugee situation. Once significant progress had been made with the Bhutanese, then the GON would be willing to revisit the issue of Tibetan

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refugees. The Prime Minister was similarly reticent about the Assistant Secretary's request to allow the 59 extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) among the Bhutanese refugees to be promptly granted exit permits. Instead, the Prime Minister preferred that the EVIs be included with the first group of refugees processed from the camps.

#### Request to Put Pressure on Bhutan and India

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14. (C) As GON officials had done in her meetings on October 31 (reftel A), Prime Minister Koirala urged the U.S. to put pressure on the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) to accept repatriation of the refugees and to not displace additional Nepali speakers. As he has stated previously to the local press, the Prime Minister would like as many refugees as possible to be repatriated before the RGOB holds its first democratic election in 2008. Koirala was frustrated that the Government of India (GOI) had taken little interest in the Bhutanese refugees. If both the U.S. and the GOI put pressure on Bhutan the Prime Minister hoped some progress could be made. Dr. Chalise volunteered that Nepal was willing to take part in tripartite talks with the RGOB and GOI. The Assistant Secretary replied that she would convey these messages on her upcoming trips to Bhutan and India.

#### Bhutanese Refugee Leader Takes Moderate Stance

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15. (C) In a meeting later November 3 with the Kathmandu-based Bhutanese Movement Steering Committee (BMSC), led by Tek Nath Rizal, Rizal continued to push repatriation as the best option but also affirmed that the BMSC would not oppose resettlement for those who chose that option. Rizal again floated his suggestion that the U.S. should host a tripartite meeting with Nepal, Bhutan, and India to make repatriation possible. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey did not address this proposal but she did state that she was going on to Bhutan and India in order to discuss both repatriation and the international community's firm opposition to any further

expulsions from Bhutan. Press reports quoting Rizal following the meeting were consistent with the relatively moderate position he took during the meeting with the Assistant Secretary.

#### Good Meetings with Tibetans

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16. (SBU) The Assistant Secretary toured the Tibetan Refugee Reception Center (TRCC) and met with recent arrivals, including a group that had been shot at by Chinese police on the Nanpa Pass (reftel B). TRCC Director Kelsang Chung explained the process and challenges facing new arrivals at the TRCC to the Assistant Secretary. At a private lunch with a human rights activist with the International Campaign for Tibet, Tibetans briefed the Assistant Secretary on ongoing human rights issues faced by Tibetans in Tibet and Nepal.

#### Comment

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17. (C) The Assistant Secretary addressed most of the Prime Minister's immediate concerns about the U.S. resettlement process for Bhutanese refugees, but we believe he is going to be disappointed if he thinks large numbers of refugees will return to Bhutan in time to participate in their upcoming election. The PM's comments about Tibetans and Chinese sensitivities were not unexpected. We welcome the Prime Minister's clear and strong assertion that the issuance of exit permits will not pose a problem, but we are not taking any chances. The Ambassador informed Koirala that she and UNHCR Representative Abraham would be requesting an appointment with him in the near future to discuss details of the exit permit process. Although Rizal and the other BMSC representatives were surprisingly moderate in their stance toward resettlement with the Assistant Secretary and with the

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media, in contrast to their prior statements, it also remains to be seen if they will use their influence in the camps to temper some of the more extreme elements opposed to resettlement.

8.(C) Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey cleared an early draft of this cable.

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